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kind, but they are considerations which demand careful attention in any intelligent determination of that duty, and they spring naturally from our viewing the matter from the standpoint of survival through selective struggle. The field truly is the world, but it is a world "that lieth in wickedness;" and to forego strategic advantage or to waste reformatory energy by refusing to view the world or society as they are is to squander our moral patrimony and to waste our moral resources.

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## SUGGESTION AS A FACTOR IN SOCIAL PROGRESS.

ONE of the remarkable potencies in human development to which investigators have just begun to apply the scientific method is the part played in social progress by the form of influence known as suggestion. We have here disclosed for us a deep-reaching influence of which it would be difficult to exaggerate the scope. Even after parental care has been brought to bear upon the child in the home, the grown individual still needs the action of a social environment, since it is the constant, the normal influence of this environment which holds him to the particular stage of civilization which his society represents. For without some such process, the social units could not be kept sufficiently like each other in mental and moral characteristics to enable them to co-operate for social ends. The influence thus exerted differs from that of hypnotic suggestion merely in the fact that, instead of being made to us in a cataleptic condition by an operator, it comes from the people with whom we associate and from the community in the midst of which we live.

Recognition of these social influences and of their moulding power raises the question of the attitude of society towards the social unit, and we are at once reminded of the fact that by a psychological law, the evidences of which abound, the

opinion of a community tends to realize itself in the individual or the class upon whom it bears. The belief which men entertain regarding us, establishing itself in our minds as a perpetually renewed suggestion, modifies our personality, and in the end—unless we are strong enough to resist it—fashions our character and conduct into more or less of likeness with itself. The enormous importance of the social attitude in determining our character as individuals, and our value as such to society, is thus obvious. It is well understood, even by those who have not traced the phenomenon to social suggestion, that individual efficiency in any walk of life is at its maximum when the attitude of the community is most favorable. Equally true must it be that an unfavorable attitude—altogether apart from the question of its justice or injustice—must be harmful, not only to those against whom it is directed, but also to the community itself.

We see this first in the home. Here the injurious influences of pessimism are readily apparent. To constantly treat children as irredeemably bad—to habitually apply to them epithets which indicate a settled conviction of their wickedness—to surround them, in a word, with an atmosphere of moral pessimism—is to accustom them to the idea of their own depravity, to implant in their immature, impressionable minds the belief not only that badness is their normal condition, but that it is one from which they can never hope to emerge. As young people are much more susceptible to hypnotic influences than those more advanced in years, so they are more peculiarly open to suggestions coming from those in authority over them. To familiarize them, therefore, with the idea of their personal depravity, is to create by suggestion a bent of moral nature in the direction of depravity. A child constantly reminded of its inherent wickedness, and knowing that nothing save wickedness is expected of it,—that in the persistent pessimism of the parental attitude its lucid intervals of goodness must all go for nothing,—what tendency can such a child have towards self-improvement? With the very capacity for goodness denied it, the child must grow up fashioned more or less to the likeness of the pessimistic con-

ception formed by its parental guides. And who can say how much recklessness in after life, how much persistent hardness of heart in anti-social attitudes, has not had its birth in the blighting pessimism of the home?

The same lesson is yielded in that second stage of preparation for social suggestion,—the school. Here the child receives a new set of influences having authoritative form, and here the tendencies imparted in the home are neutralized or intensified. Happily, there are teachers who know how to accustom even a backward child to the thought that he has within him possibilities almost infinite. But there are also pessimists in education who seem to delight in crushing in upon the pupil, mentally weak, the sense of its many deficiencies. To seize every opportunity to remind it that it is slow in this branch, incapable in that, positively dull and stupid in a third, is the blunder of the pedagogue who could not do worse were it his desire to brand his victim with mental incapacity for life. The moral paralysis of the individual which is threatened by pessimism only begins in the home; his intellectual paralysis is usually achieved once and for all in the badly ordered school-room.

But the period of tuition offers only a restricted scope for the possibilities of suggestion. For after the school comes the great world over which the evil of distrust in men hangs like a cloud. Here is the field, par excellence, of social influence visibly connected with the psychology of the lower life; for even the animals receive favorable or unfavorable suggestions from one another, and act accordingly. Our first cousin in the organic genealogy is wild because of its well-founded distrust of other animals. Brought into human surroundings and "domesticated," it gradually ceases to snarl and show its teeth,—forgets, as it were, to assume the attitude of defence on the approach of other animate beings,—for the reason that it now lives under peace conditions, is no longer afraid of its animal or human environment. When we call it "tamed," we really mean that it has the benefit of an optimistic attitude. It is the same truth which finds illustration in human societies. The pessimism of primitive peoples per-

petually at war with each other stands naturally correlated with their low social condition. When every man's hand was against every other, and the main business of life was that of defence or attack, there could be no leisure for developing the arts of civilization. The germs of mutual trust between man and man, between one community and another, had to spring up before even the beginnings could be made of that industrial co-operation which now covers the planet with its net-work of railways and telegraph lines. And if anything were needed to show the injury which pessimism causes to the interests of social progress, it would be forthcoming in that universal acceptance of mutual faith of man in man as the principle which must lie at the foundation of all our modern commerce.

Humanity has made enormous progress since the days of the persecutions for witchcraft. Yet the pessimistic attitude of man towards his fellow is by no means a thing of the past. Though manifested in less violent forms, the distrust is no less wide-spread. And though while in some directions, as in the relations of trade, we show faith in men by our acts, in our thoughts we surround them with an atmosphere of suspicion. The high modern development of the quality of "smartness" protects most of us from the danger of being "taken in" by any outward semblance of moral or intellectual superiority, and the ease with which the colloquial epithet of "fraud" rises to the lips, is the suggestive mark of a much diffused mental attitude towards psychic values. In the moral dynamics of the world, qualities not widely possessed are rarely believed in; nor is credulity regarding the prevalence of evil wholly out of relation to the capacity for it. In these high civilizations, which only the Anglo-Saxon race has been able to produce, we tend to judge men by the worst that is in them rather than by the best. For our social gatherings, we have the pessimism of the secret whisper, of the malevolence that masks itself with smiles, of the kisses between women that stab like daggers. Everywhere, as Schiller sings,

Es liebt die Welt das Glänzende zu schwarzen,  
Und das Erhabene im Staub zu ziehen.

In politics we fear treachery from our associates, and impute base motives to our opponents. At the least disturbance of the normal flow of events, one's nation is in danger. Distrustful among themselves, men are pessimistic as a community. The foreigner, whether as an immigrant or as a government, is always seeking to gain advantage at the country's expense. And when a political issue is added to distrust in international relations, we get that product of the pessimistic attitude known as "jingoism."

Society has its classes whose mental habit, born of their function in civilization, inevitably tends to promote the darker views of life and human nature. There have been pessimists since the beginnings of literature, and we have had declarations that the world is evil in various tones from various voices. Since Job complained that his days were "swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and spent without hope," all forms of religious and philosophical pessimism have had a hearing, from Gnosticism, Manicheism, Augustinianism, down to modern orthodoxy. Calderon has assured us that "man's greatest crime is that he was born;" and A. de Lamartine asks querulously,

Quel crime avons-nous fait pour mériter de naître ?

For Leopardi, life is "*amaro e noia*," and the world simply "*fango*,"—a piece of plain speaking which startles until we read in Eduard von Hartmann that description of the universe as "an agonizing blister on the all-pervading Being," which introduces us to realism in speculation as nothing else ever can.

This constant teaching of the evil of existence, even by philosophers who have a system to build up, or, again, by poets who see the world through the glasses of their personal experience, darkly, has not been without its influence in directing the energies of the reformer. But when it becomes injurious to the interests of the race, Nature herself condemns it. The utility of optimism in race perpetuation is incontestable. Upon the view that life is worth living, however inculcated or reached, all social progress finally depends. The great masses

of mankind—despite Buddhism in the ancient world and Schopenhauerism in the modern—have held in this regard a sturdy and unfailing optimism. Men who, like Alexander von Humboldt, view marriage as a sin, and the propagation of children as a crime, may seem worthy of survival, if only on account of their intellectual eminence; yet their attitude towards race interests is simply a sentence of self-extinction. There never was a time in the conflict between the optimism of the physiological process and the pessimism of the intellect when Nature did not know how to take sides. And she has never been truer to herself than when, through the instrumentality of natural selection, she has safeguarded humanity from any form of doubt or unbelief which, realized in conduct, seriously threatened to impair that formidable pressure from below upward, the “will to live.”

But while philosophical pessimism is active mainly in the sphere of the intellect, religious pessimism carries its influence deep down into the realm of feeling and conscience. From the beginning, men feared their environment, saw evil potencies in the multifarious forces of nature. The earliest gods were evil, and workers of evil. Even so cultured a nation as the Greeks believed in Furies who had a divinely appointed mission to torment mankind. The Buddhists taught the evil of human existence in so absolute a form that the only escape therefrom lay in self-annihilation. The pessimism of the Christian view is, historically speaking, only less pronounced. There are, it is true, the joys of Paradise, but over against these have been set the terrors of hell, and a conception of God not falling short, in cruelty and vindictiveness, of the most elementary ideas of deity held by barbarous peoples. It would not therefore be difficult to sustain the thesis that low conceptions of “the power outside us that makes for righteousness” have been responsible for much of the intellectual, social, above all, the moral inertia of past ages. Being representations conceived in the likeness of man, as he is at a given time, they not only tend to confirm him in his view of himself, but obtain, so to speak, a celestial sanction for a particular stage of social progress, and thus help to perpetuate that

stage. It being impossible for the morality of men to rise higher than that of the gods they worship, human advance must always have been powerfully limited by systems of theology. We can easily understand how little individual liberty could have been promoted by the wide-spread belief in a deity who was conceived of as a tyrant; and why it is that even to-day the most uncompromising upholder of the necessity of divine retribution looks in vain for popular warmth in the cause of prison reform to an age which accepted Dante's description of hell as a plausible account of the attitude of the Deity towards mankind.

The most serious feature of the Christian system has been its doctrine of the inherent depravity of human nature. Through ages unlighted by a gleam of our modern knowledge, this thought of the natural, inevitable wickedness of man must have weighed on the human conscience like a nightmare. It would be difficult to over-estimate the effect for evil of the sense of sin maintained for centuries as a principle of human conduct. A few heroic souls here and there may have been spurred, through untold agonies, to what has been called "the higher life;" but the great mass of the people open to religious influences must have been held at the level of this low idea of their possibilities. A suggestion thus maintained with the whole power of the church and the force of public opinion could not but tend to realize itself. Belief in the wickedness of an individual or a community is psychologically not distinguishable from the expectation of wickedness, and the gradual moulding of the mind to familiarity with that expectation is an influence which only intellectual and moral giants could resist. Remembering, therefore, the tremendous power of social suggestion in the religious field, where the teaching of the church is reinforced by divine authority; recalling the sluggish moral life of the past, the comparatively recent emergence of mankind into tolerably humane social conditions, there seems far too much reason to fear that the pessimism of the historic religions has proved for many the high road, not to spiritual health, but to moral paralysis.



The power of the minister of religion to promote the more discouraging views of human nature is unquestionable. That he is usually a pessimist *sans le vouloir* does not alter the fact that his interests lie in the direction of a robust belief in the reality of moral evil, of a saintly desire to hold it up to public reprobation. It is his function to pursue wickedness through all its disguises, to drag it from its lurking places, to bring it to the bar of righteousness for the good of mankind, the amelioration of the world. The motives of such a man are the highest. Yet his openness of mind to individual depravity and collective wrong-doing is to be measured, not only by aim, but also by result; not only by the good it may do, but also by its power to perpetuate evil through the potent influences of suggestion. It is in many ways useful to proclaim the ubiquitous presence of temptation, the ineradicable tendency of fallen, unaided man to yield thereto; yet the process is one calculated neither to supply the over-sensitive, self-tortured saint with the healthy calmness which his nature needs, nor to relieve the hardened sinner from the influence of the authoritative recognition of sin as his normal condition. That Satan is to be trodden down under our feet is a proposition which commands the immediate assent of all good people, but its constant reiteration through ages of the life of a church is apt to teach rather the permanence of the Satanic element than to hold out the prospect of its early, or even of its possible, elimination. And as antagonisms, whether physical or moral, are mutually self-involved and self-supporting, it may be wise for the over-pessimistic minister to ask himself how far his own warfare has gone towards stimulating that same "The world, the flesh, and the devil" to which his church undoubtedly owes something of its opportunities for aggressive virtue in the past.

There are certainly signs of a new order. To-day, cheerful influences radiate from pulpits out of which the doctrine of eternal damnation was once uttered in no uncertain tone. It is a far cry from Calvinism to Universalism. But the suggestion of dependence is still conveyed, even by preachers the most optimistic. For, much as a clergyman may insist on the

final appeal to conscience,—much as he may point to the Scriptures as the common source, open to all, of knowledge and authority in religious matters,—there is gradually set up between him and his parishioner a relation that does not tend to qualify the latter as his own spiritual authority. The superior ease for both of such a relation is undoubted ; yet the acquired habit of being sermonized at the end of every week into patches of goodness during the next seven days is a process which must be supplemented by much independence of character in the listener, if it is to lead in the direction of moral spontaneity.

Physicians constitute another class of men whose influence is pessimistic. As the clergyman is interested in the discovery and removal of spiritual evil, so the interests of the doctor lie in the diagnosis and elimination of corporeal evil. To say that the sudden and complete elimination of bodily ailments would work havoc with the physician's income is a truth that carries with it no reproach to a body of men who from the beginning have been distinguished for their unselfishness in the service of humanity. Doctors have a moral interest in the banishment of disease higher than that of their social position in the world ; as a class, they allow no pecuniary considerations to stand between them and the relief of suffering. Yet disease is a necessity to them, first, by reason of the professional victories which it enables them to win, and next, for the ethical satisfaction afforded by the opportunities it brings of ministering to the deepest needs of their fellow-men. What is more, the very occupation of a doctor helps to promote in a community the belief in the reality of its diseases, as well as to confirm it in the view that disease is a permanent element of its life.

But we may go still deeper. As there is an occult realm of spiritual things which, passing ordinary comprehension, needs to be interpreted by an expert ; so the domain of disease is one whose lore can only be reached by the average man through the physician. While, therefore, in the religious field men grow dependent upon the clergyman for knowledge on such abstruse themes as God, heaven, immortality ; so the

mass of the people in a community acquire a similar relation of dependence towards the doctors whom they habitually consult. That physicians are not financially interested in removing this dependence upon their ministrations is obvious. Friendly in an especial degree to popular enlightenment, their efforts are not exactly directed towards the qualifying of the average man for the medical care of his own body. As from the clergyman's point of view a man need not necessarily be his own spiritual adviser, so, from the point of view of the physician, the prudent member of society does well to avoid the risk of aspiring to become his own physiological and pathological expert.

The reality of the effect here described becomes more apparent when we recognize the large part played in disease by the mental element. A man knowing little or nothing of his own body—with no expert knowledge of the internal organs and processes by which his life is maintained—is easily made afraid by even slight disturbances of their normal working. For the untutored of all classes the realm of pathology is peopled by forms as terrible as ever haunted the religious imagination in the crudest days of theological speculation. It is unquestionable, as shown not only by the importance of the patent medicine trade, but also by medical advertisements in newspapers, that large numbers in every community pass their lives in a state of almost morbid anxiety regarding their bodily condition. A great number of so-called ailments have no existence save in the imagination of the patient himself; a great many more are of so slight a character as to need for their removal simply the mental cure, which, in perfect good faith, the druggist and the doctor so often co-operate to bring about. Even in cases of some seriousness, the function of the physician is admittedly that of "aiding nature." What aiding nature really means is sufficiently indicated by La Fontaine's fable of the effects respectively produced on their patients by the two physicians, Tant Pis and Tant Mieux. The regular call, the soothing word, the formally administered medicine, plenty of light, fresh air in abundance, judiciously chosen nourishment, these constitute, for a large proportion

of patients, the whole thaumaturgy of the doctor who really knows his business. None the less is the physician bound to believe in the reality of the great bulk of the ailments that are brought to him for his personal attention. Given, therefore, the fact that ailments may be produced in a healthy body by the mere suggestion of them, one hazards nothing in saying that the Tant Pis attitude in disease, like the pessimistic attitude in religion, tends to realize itself alike in the individual and the community.

In the various moral agencies which modern societies maintain, the scope for the pessimistic attitude is enormous. And here, owing to the publicity gained, the influence of suggestion is all-pervasive. The tendency set up in impressionable minds to imitate an action or course of conduct powerfully realized has been shown in the most serious of the forms of evil with which great cities have to deal. All of us remember the story of the soldiers who committed suicide one after another in the same sentry-box owing to the suggestion given by the first act of homicide there by one of their number. We know, too, from the annals of English jurisprudence, that when minor offences were visited with the death penalty, men would go from witnessing a hanging and incur the same penalty by the commission of the same offence. That the powerfully realized knowledge of crime tends in weak minds to the commission of crime is now a psychological commonplace. And though men are less impelled to these imitative acts under the improved conditions of modern communities, the power of suggesting evil by the public punishment or denunciation of it still remains. There are men and women living, for example, who trace their first fall towards intemperance to the curiosity and fascination aroused at home by the absolute prohibition there of intoxicating liquors. The public condemnation of drinking habits, again, with the elaborate machinery which has been called into existence for their suppression, is to some extent, at any rate, the feeder of the very evil which it is sought to eliminate. We have only to recall the notorious effects of the public prohibition of indecent literature to be convinced that open

antagonism, by means such as carry the suggestion of it all over the community, is neither the wisest nor the most efficacious means of suppression.

It is here difficult, moreover, to avoid the thought of a close connection between pessimism in moral matters and the zeal which is so often shown in this branch of social reform. The belief that Providence has committed the moral policing of the world to their care amounts with some almost to a monomania; and when such people, often the best in the community, once fairly take the universe on their shoulders, consequences more or less disastrous are inevitable. We get then the spasms of virtue to which all communities are liable; but we get also that stimulus to wickedness which follows the wide-spread and authoritative expectation of it. And in the result we are once more reminded that a population which is taught to depend for its moral stimulus upon the constant nagging of good people who mean it well, can have little of that spontaneous motion towards right conduct which is the life and soul of all morality worthy of the name.

There is, finally, the pessimism of the classes engaged in the maintenance of social order. We have here two branches,—legislative and executive,—and both of them, as functionaries, if not as individuals, naturally incline to a gloomy view of mankind. The tendency of law-giving is certainly not in the direction of the discovery of how many laws can be dispensed with: it is rather towards keeping pace with civilization by the making of new crimes. A good legislator cannot take chances: he must not, at least, err on the side of a too confiding trust in human nature. He can no more afford to believe in the absolute moral purity of mankind than the physician in its bodily, or the clergyman in its spiritual, health. A similar bent of mind is to be looked for in the police-officer. We need not, of course, see an unreasoning Javert in every gendarme we meet; nor is it necessary to attribute to our *agent de sûreté* any of that belief in the ubiquitousness of crime which has been burlesqued in the ridicule cast upon the bogus detective agencies. Just as legislators are often optimistic in their individual capacity, so police-officers may

be found who are themselves the severest critics of the system they administer. It is none the less true that as a class the executive officers of the law are not optimistic on the subject of human nature. Familiar with the frailties of men, and knowing bad men better than good, the myrmidon of the law would be more than human if he did not tend to see in mankind its worst rather than its best possibilities. And as he is often called upon to act in a quasi-judicial capacity, affecting people not yet accused of crime, or just delivered from its punishment, his official attitude may not be without its effect on his decisions. Without being interested in the perpetuation of wrong-doing, he none the less belongs to a class which finds its opportunities of professional activity in the constant recrudescence of the evil possibilities of human nature.

More serious still in its bearing on people convicted of crime is suggestion which comes from society itself. The one hope of reforming the criminal is that of arresting his progress from a temporary to a permanent anti-social attitude,—the hope of preventing him from going over irrevocably into the ranks of the enemy,—the hope of convincing him that he belongs, not to the forces of evil, but to those of good. Now it is this hope which social suggestion is continually working to defeat. Between the man convicted of crime and the rest of humanity society thrusts an enormous gulf. It teaches the convict that he is henceforth separate from his fellow-men by a total difference of kind. The first suggestion of this difference is conveyed by the atmosphere of the prison. Here the evil is not so much that a man comes into contact with other criminals who may be worse than himself, but that he has over and around him those suggestions of evil which ever work to realize themselves in his character. The gaol focuses on its unhappy occupant something at least of the shadow of the social discrimination outside. A still deeper gloom awaits him beyond the walls of the prison. His formal punishment over, he goes forth into society only to feel the crushing force of the new judgment he has earned by expiating his crime. The world sees in him only potentialities for evil: of what avail, against the mark it has authoritatively set

on him, the germs of good that are within? Is it wonder that with nobody to believe in him he should lose faith in himself, or that the work of suggestion begun in the prison should realize itself in the stress of the hostile social attitude outside? A push from one, a kick from another, everywhere pitiless ostracism by the well-to-do and fortunate, and the result which each would shrink from compassing is brought about by all,—despair, suicide, ending in a pauper's grave; or a reckless, hard-hearted criminal, newly manufactured by society, to be a source of evil and a permanent charge on the state while he lives.

Enough has now been said to show that the pessimistic attitude is injurious to social progress, not because it recognizes the evil, but because it ignores the good there is in men. The masses of mankind have lived in the past under the influence of a social hypnosis which, denying to them all but a scant importance in the scheme of things, has made individual conduct a matter of little importance to the individual. We read of philosophical systems under whose teaching the stars have become

Tyrants in your iron skies,  
Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,  
Cold fires, yet with power to brand and burn  
His nothingness into man.

More deep reaching in its effect on human character has been the influence by which, relegated to classes and positions in the social hierarchy, men have been morally degraded. Were it possible to formulate the psychology of anti-social attitudes, it would be found that the individual has been led into them not by inordinate vanity, by overweening self-conceit, but by the low idea the social unit has been taught to form of himself. As a new attitude of society towards the man whom it notices or honors powerfully affects his view of himself,—leads to the self-recognition of possibilities of good in which he had never before believed,—so such a new attitude towards whole classes as shall raise them in their own estimation must act potently to the promotion of social welfare. Even the success of work like that of the college settlements,

the Salvation Army, and of various philanthropic agencies, may be traced, not only to the material aid rendered, but also to the attitude which conveys the stimulus of a sense of personal worth even to the most neglected.

The same is true in the field of moral reform. The great need of the time is not the sense of sin, already over-emphasized, but a knowledge in men of their higher and better selves. In past ages society has been trying to get the best from individuals by expecting their worst; through centuries of psychological darkness regarding the conditions of human progress it has been endeavoring to promote social advance by means of moral degradation. It is only now that we are getting glimpses of a truer method. We are learning from the study of social suggestion, not only that we cannot improve the world by laying our chief emphasis on its evil, but that we shall equally fail to ameliorate human nature if we withhold from it the subtle encouragement of our belief in its inherent good. A new instrument of progress, unknown to the ages of exaggerated individualism, is now within our reach, and we are to use it, not to make moral automata of men, but to awaken in them the power, so far as may be, of a spontaneously moral life; not to accustom them to the moral slavery of dependence on the community for the impulse towards virtue, but to stimulate them to the self-development of whatever is best in human character and conduct. When society has learned how to utilize the great force at its command for the real ends of social progress, individuals and communities alike will find their strength in a mutual faith that shall remove mountains.

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